

## **EMPLOYEES' CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

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**Abstract:** In this scientific endeavour we address continuous professional development in organizations. Taking into account that continuous professional development involves certain organizational efforts, including financial ones, it is necessary to determine its impact on organizational results in the short and medium term. Therefore, it is more than necessary to assess continuing professional development by linking objectives to the outcomes. In this paper, we have made a correlation between objectives and outcomes of continuing professional development. Thus, organizations can set several professional development objectives for different categories of employees. Likewise, the results obtained from continuing professional development are different and can have effects on the organization in the short and medium term. In order to analyse the perception of domestic organizations on continuous professional development, a questionnaire was applied and the sample was 350 enterprises, out of which only 278 had carried out staff professional development activities in the last three years. The results obtained from the data processing show that there are discrepancies in the objectives of professional development. Similarly, the outcomes of professional development are perceived differently. According to the respondents, professional development of employees has an impact on organizational performance.

**Keywords:** continuing professional development, professional development objectives, professional development outcomes, organizational performance, professional knowledge and skills.

**JEL Classification:** J24; J44; L25; M53.

### **1 Introduction**

In the knowledge-based economy, human resource development is an increasingly demanding activity for organizations. As professional knowledge and skills matter more and more in achieving organizational performance, senior management of organizations are determined to allocate more human and financial resources to the effective delivery of employee development activities within organizations. Continuing professional development activity refers to adult education and is designed to produce positive changes in employees' beliefs, knowledge, skills, or behaviours, with the ultimate result of changing their capabilities (Lauer et al., 2014). Continuing professional development is viewed as a fundamental tool for enhancing organizational capability and performance to achieve organizational goals. According to Hughes et al. (2019), quality training reduces the learning period and increases employees' motivation to transfer learning outcomes to the organization. Also, Garavan et al. (2021) examined the effects of quality, quantity, and institutional context on the relationship between professional development and organizational performance.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the objectives of continuous professional development in organizations and the results achieved by them. In order to achieve the research aim, the paper is structured in several sections. In the first section, the literature review on organizational objectives and outcomes of continuing professional development is conducted. In the next section the research methodology is presented. The paper continues with the results and general conclusions.

## **2 Literature review**

From an organizational perspective, the process of continuous professional development can be used as an example of HR practices that contribute to gaining competitive advantage (Jehanzeb et al., 2013). Continuous professional development, also perceived as lifelong learning, is a concern of the European Union and is seen as one of the essential elements of flexicurity. The results of a survey conducted in EU Member States, Norway and Iceland on a sample of 40 000 adults over the age of 25 show that government should prioritize adult learning. This statement was agreed by at least two thirds of adults in each Member State. According to respondents, the benefits of participating in learning included support for their personal development, necessary for career progression and job search, the possibility of earning a higher income and help in reducing unemployment (Harris & Clayton, 2020).

At the same time, continuing professional development involves several objectives, and the results are beneficial to both the organization and the community. Thus, Dayan & Eks, (2007), argue that continuing professional development pursues several objectives:

- protecting employees from unemployment;
- increasing organizational performance by investing in operational processes;
- promoting employment;
- stimulating global competition.

On the other hand, Armstrong (2003) argues that the fundamental purpose of continuing professional development is to support the organization in achieving its goals by increasing the value of employees. The same author highlights several organizational objectives with reference to continuing professional development:

- developing the competencies and improving the performance of employees;
- development of employees within the organization in order to satisfy the workforce needs within the organization;
- reducing the learning period for employees promoted to different positions, ensuring that skills are acquired in a short time and at minimal cost.

Continuous professional development has become one of the main keys to ensuring long careers for all employees. Under these circumstances, responsibility for professional development should be shared between employees, employers and public institutions (Marion et al., 2012).

At the same time, Schwartz & Bryan (1998) believe that it is important which categories of employees should be attracted to the professional development process. Within the organization, continuous professional development is the way in which employees maintain their knowledge and skills related to their working life (Collin et al, 2012).

Dessler (2006) defines continuous professional development as an activity designed to improve current and future workplace performance. According to Noe et al. (2007), human resource development should be perceived as a sustainable process of management within the organization to improve employee competence and job performance through various training and education programs.

Werner & DeSimone (2006) explain that training program not only contributes to the development of employees but also helps organizations to make the best use of their human resources to gain competitive advantage. In this context, Haryono et al (2020) believe that organizations are obliged to plan such training programs for their employees to improve their knowledge and skills at work. According to the authors, professional development influences the motivation of employees, because as a result of their participation in training programs, their skills and qualification level increase, which enables them to perform more complex tasks. Also, Güllü (2016) shows that professional development program has a positive impact on the motivation of employees in the banking sector. Continuous professional development has positive effects on employees as it gives them more job security and higher wages (Kumar et al., 2019; Starr, 2019), which leads to increasing work motivation in the organization. As a result, Wang et al. (2021) believe that these effects positively influence employee quality of life. According to Krumbiegel et al. (2018), there is also a feedback explained by the fact that better paid employees have more opportunities for professional development and consequently higher job satisfaction. Straightforwardly, these effects are also beneficial for the organization as they lead to an improvement of the organization's economic situation.

In the same line of thinking, Samoliuk et al. (2021) argue that adults' motivation for continuing professional development is driven by the improvement of their own professional level, and in the case of senior managers who fund such programs - the desire to increase economic performance and organizational competitiveness. Moreover, some authors believe that continuing professional development has a positive impact on the development of the country or certain activities (Chung & Tseng, 2019; Varma & Kataria, 2018).

For the organization, the benefits from continuing professional development mainly relate to improved performance, profitability, efficiency and increased revenue from operational activities (Rawashdeh, 2018), as well as improved reputation of the organization, reduced staff turnover and reduced costs (Ramendram et al., 2014). Besides, organizations' involvement in continuous professional development process can help to increase employees' commitment to the organization (Kadiresan et al., 2015). The studies have shown that employees who have a positive perception towards continuous professional development have higher organizational commitment (Bartlett, 2001). Moreover, Saleem et al. (2011) find that continuous professional development contributes to improving employee behaviour and increasing confidence and self-esteem, which leads to increasing loyalty and commitment to the organization (Kenny & Nnamdi, 2019).

Bilderback (2024) examined the results of continuing professional development in the light of the Sustainable Development Goals. According to the author, companies that invest in sustainable training and align themselves with the principles of the SDGs are more likely to succeed in the long term, as they will be able to attract and retain employees who share their values.

Broadly speaking, any professional development objective can be assessed by the organization's post-training outcomes. Park & Jacobs (2011) found that workplace learning outcomes can be grouped into three categories:

- on-the-job learning outcomes: employee satisfaction, commitment, motivation, behaviour, and individual or group performance;
- organizational performance outcomes: productivity, quality, innovation, absenteeism, turnover and conflict;
- organizational financial outcomes: profit, return on investment, return on assets, return on equity, and market value for listed companies

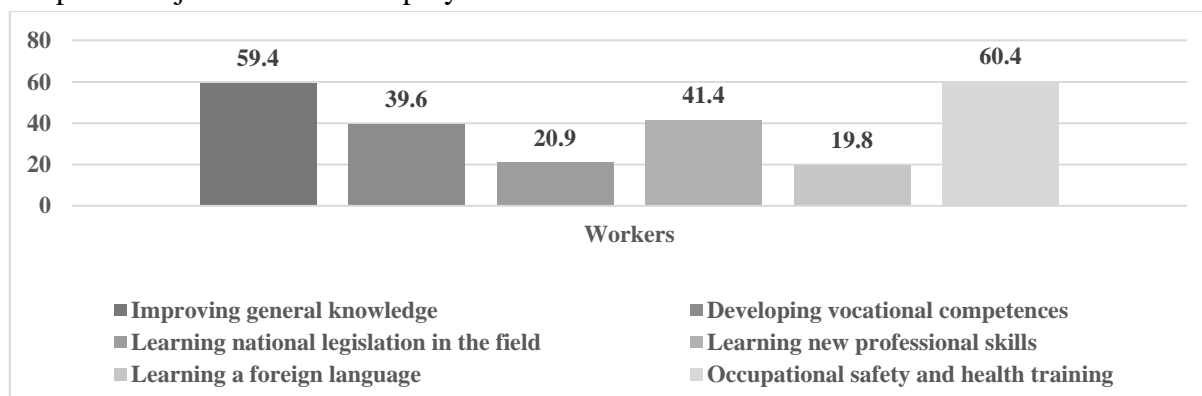
### 3 Research methodology

In order to achieve the aim of the research, a questionnaire was developed in which questions related to the objectives and outcomes of continuing professional development were formulated. For the question related to the objectives of continuing professional development, 6 answer options were formulated, and for the results of continuing professional development - 10 answer options. Taking into account the fact that the objectives of continuing professional development may vary from one category of employees to another, the respondents were asked to define them in three categories: workers, specialists and managers. In the case of the results of continuing professional development, respondents were able to choose more than one response option.

The sample comprised 350 organizations. The respondents were human resource managers or senior managers of the organizations, depending on their size. Out of the total number of organizations participating in the survey, 278 companies have provided professional development programs to their employees in the last three years. Respectively, the processing of the questionnaire results covered 278 enterprises.

### 4 Research results

As mentioned in the first part of the paper, the senior management of organizations aims, through continuous professional development, to achieve various objectives. As the objectives of continuing professional development are diverse, they may cover certain needs of the organization, either short term or long term. The research results show that the organization's professional development objectives vary depending on the category of employees. Figure 1 shows the continuing professional development objectives of the employees.

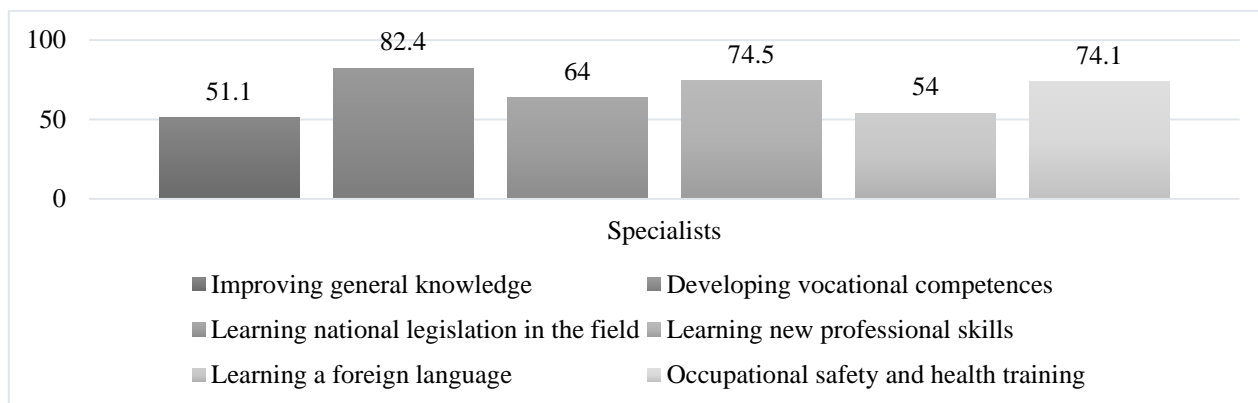


**Figure 1. Objectives of vocational training of workers, %**

Source: Developed by author.

From Figure 1, we can see that the organization's objectives for workers' professional development focused more on occupational safety and health training and improving general knowledge. About 3/5 of the responding organizations mentioned this. Only 1/5 of the responding organizations targeted, for workers, the learning of relevant legislation and the possibility to learn a foreign language. At the same time, about 2/5 of the survey respondents aimed through their professional development programs to improve workers' current skills as well as to develop new skills among workers.

In contrast to blue-collar workers, the professional development goals of specialists differ because organizations have higher expectations from this category of employees (Figure 2).

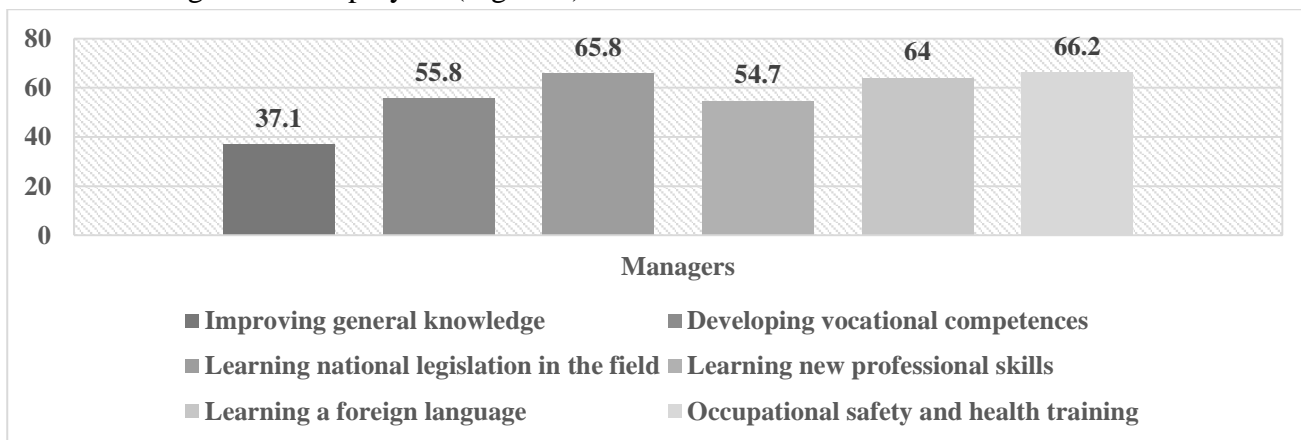


**Figure 2. Objectives of vocational training of specialists, %**

Source: Developed by author.

In the case of specialists, the organization's professional development objectives are more focused on improving current professional skills (82.4%), as well as on acquiring new professional skills (74.5). Also, almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the responding organizations aim through professional development to enrich knowledge in the field of occupational safety and health. Slightly more than 50% of the responding organizations aimed to improve their general knowledge and foreign language skills.

Regarding organizations' objectives for managers' professional development, they differ from the other two categories of employees (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Objectives of vocational training of managers, %**

Source: Developed by author.

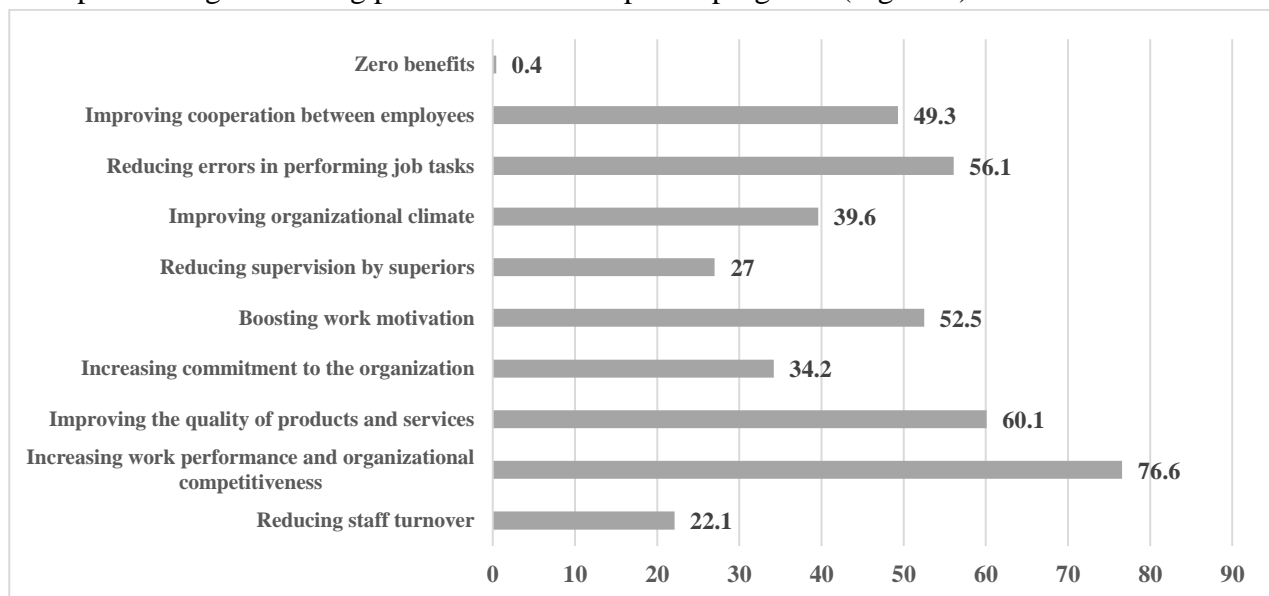
In the process of managers' professional development, organizations aim for managers to learn national legislation in the field and to enrich their knowledge of occupational safety and health (almost  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the responding organizations). Similarly, domestic organizations give priority to learning a foreign language - 64%.

Comparatively, we find that the majority of respondent organizations have the objective of improving knowledge in the field of occupational safety and health as the most frequently mentioned by respondents. This is due to the fact that domestic organizations are obliged by national legislation to conduct occupational safety and health training annually. While this objective may have indirect effects on organizational results by reducing absenteeism due to occupational illness and accidents, it does not contribute substantially to improved performance in the long term.

Improving current job skills and developing new job skills are two key objectives for organizational performance. Research results show that domestic organizations are more focused on the development of new professional skills among specialists, far exceeding this objective in relation to workers. The same situation is characteristic for the improvement of current skills, the gap being much wider.

In a globalized world, employees' knowledge of a foreign language is an advantage for domestic organizations. Many organizations are aware of the need to allocate financial resources to language learning. Managers and specialists are the categories of employees that organizations are targeting to achieve this objective. Nowadays, knowledge of a foreign language by all categories of employees is inevitable. Therefore, organizations should provide equal opportunities in language learning to all employees.

The benefits that organizations obtain as a result of the continuous professional development of their employees are different and depend on the preestablished objectives. In order to achieve the purpose of the research, we aimed to highlight the benefits gained by the respondent organizations as a result of implementing continuing professional development programs (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Organizations' benefits from continuing professional development**

Source: Developed by author.

According to Figure 4, the majority of the responding organizations (76.6%) perceive increased job performance and organizational competitiveness as a benefit resulting from the continuous professional development of employees. Therefore, continuous professional development has positive effects on organizational performance. In turn, organizational performance is influenced by other organizational variables, such as the quality of products and services, errors in the process of performing work tasks, organizational climate, organizational commitment, etc. Improved quality of products and services and reduced errors in performing work tasks are the benefits that were most frequently mentioned by respondents - 60.1% and 56.1% respectively. We also note that continuous professional development has direct implications on employee motivation. 52.5% of the respondents claimed that continuous professional development led to increased employee motivation in the organization. In addition, continuous professional development had beneficial effects on employee



cooperation (49.3%). More than 1/3 of the organizations found an increase in organizational commitment as a result of continuous professional development.

Reducing staff turnover was highlighted as a benefit by the fewest responding organizations (22.1%). At the same time, we note that, although a very small number, some organizations did not derive any benefit from professional development programs. In this case, the responsibility falls on the specialists who manage professional development in the organization.

## **5 Conclusions**

Continuing professional development is an activity within organizations whose significance is constantly growing. As the knowledge-based society develops, in which professional knowledge and skills matter more and more in ensuring organizational success, it is necessary for both senior management and the human resources department to make continuous professional development a priority.

In organizations in the Republic of Moldova, we find that professional development objectives differ from one category of employees to another. Specialists and managers are the categories of employees who participate most in the professional development process. Also, most organizations conduct professional development programs due to legal constraints. This is justified by the fact that most organizations conduct professional development programmes in the field of occupational safety and health. Under these circumstances, a review of the objectives of professional development is needed, with a focus on programmes that add greater value to the organization.

Similarly, the professional development objectives should be linked to organizational outcomes. Any employee professional development objective should lead to benefits for the organization. The research has proven a direct link between employee professional development goals and organizational outcomes. Therefore, continuous professional development in organizations is important and needs to be properly addressed, including its objectives, if it is to deliver tangible results expressed in economic and social indicators.

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